

AMERICAN TOUR

By Adam Fieled



New York City Serenade

She stood on the roof of a tall building. It was a cold night, she was bundled in a leather coat over two sweaters. She looked out over Central Park, and, to her right, the Upper West Side. Here's the deal, she told herself: if I jump, I'll go after him as soon as I hit. It'll take me three months to hit, by which time I'll have the whole thing planned. I was in bed as I heard her thinking this. My brain was Swiss cheese. I was on pills.

She Don't Like, She Don't Like, She Don't Like

This isn't Stevie Nicks: she's doesn't blow
blow up her ass. She just sits up all night
with the TV on, razors & mirrors there.

She claimed to me she can communicate
with alien beings through TV images: that
extra terrestrials use colors, forms to come

through, bequeath eternal wisdom upon her,
like this: the universe is a harsh place for
the human race. We are beset by forces, rigs,

all things beyond our control. Her rig keeps
pushing her down into total disbelief in every
thing. E.T. did happen in Los Angeles, after

all. If you can see stars from the Hills, she can't.
You can't be one and see one at the same time.
How shall I say this: you haven't lived until you've

watched TV the way she does. It beats everything.
It makes the universe livable. And when the sun
comes up, if you want to die, tough shit, jack.

Phoenix Sunset

Scrape me off this barstool, throw me in front of a camera, I'd look great. That's the sad thing. The other sad thing is the way L.A. works these days (enter stage left the next easy mark); you can't climb anywhere because there is no jungle gym (she's got money), so here I am in Phoenix. It's funny to live among Wasps (end conversation soon) at the base of a big mountain with a pregnant woman and her parents (Next). Here, let me get that for you. Can I buy you a drink (I have enough for one more, then the turnaround)? I'm an actor, on leave from L.A. (this looks good) and I just got married. Oh, commercials, mostly commercials, some theater work and commercials (now the punchline). Haven't I seen you in L.A. too (bingo)? Wow, I should've married you! Well (exaggerate) the most interesting thing that's happened to me here is the gaggle of tarantulas outside my in-laws door. They were there (I mean this for once) for the ambience, and because sixty-four legs together (don't I know) can work miracles (as can a drunken one-night stand) (and as the sun sets in Phoenix, Wasps retreat into their nests, and spiders, and a pregnant naïf sits and waits for the commercials to end, and the show to begin—)

L.A. Frost

You know, I don't like L.A.
as much as I thought I would.
It's like, O.K., I'm here, I'm
set, but I don't have a car
because, yeah, I don't drive,
and, like, I know I'm supposed
to. But my friends are really
the best— these guys are going
someplace! Am I going someplace?
I'm like, yeah, no shit, I already
know so many people. It's not
like I don't have issues, but who cares?

(she repulsed his hands)

Albany's Finest

My wife: the center, fulcrum of my existence.
Has there ever been a higher mountain? I have

basked in my unworthiness enough to realize
that if we never make love again (and we won't)

I will have led the most fulfilling life ever by a
man without a trust fund. I hear her every night,

splashing around in the bath, after the kids are
asleep, and am overcome with the tender joys

that are a father's and husband's. But there's
never anything to do about it except watch TV.

So, tonight, I'm making a pilgrimage to Albany's
finest, to knock a couple back. I'm splashing

around in my own bath. I'd like to drink more
(and won't), and it occurs to me that I might

get killed on the drive home. I'm proud to still
be a little dangerous. And they have the TV on.

Sanibel

A tableaux: six figures by a pool. A boy runs around, chasing lizards, frogs. His position in the tableaux seems tenuous. A baby rides a flotation device in the pool. The father of the two children places the baby beside him so he can read his book. There's laughter from inside, and out come the mother and two grandparents, maternal. Everyone is frozen into place by the blazing sunshine. The pool is screened-in; on all sides homes with screened in pools. This is not a street but a lane— a tennis court marks the center. People play (whites on whites)— all this the boy sees. What's tenuous is that he senses something beneath. White on white could easily be blackness twice. It's all in the lizards, frogs. The boy's father knows. He's lived long enough to know to just shrug. Exposed or covered over, things are what they are. One reads, one chases; the fear beneath dissipates into the baked whirlpool of the other four.

Philly Poetry

Now, we all know we've had some setbacks recently. But, despite what some might say (and God knows they say it, or at least I think they still do), this city is stronger than ever, despite some presences we might have to accept, or have not to accept. And when the history books get written, we will have preserved what matters to us, even if we don't get acknowledged or get accolades like we deserve (we know accolades come in their own time). It's not about accolades to us: it's about principles, the sense that poets have to contribute to their community (and God help, over the long term, those who don't), to make and remake an organic world for those of us who live organically. We can all do our part, we can all pitch in, and those worth preserving always pitch in. Human groups always triumph in the end.

Betrothed in Boston

Since the Back Bay put me on my back one day,
I knew I had a crack at confirming my place “donee.”
I am a woman who knows what you’re worth.
I can calculate by forming composites of many
constituent parts: looks, charm, degrees, abilities,
funds, potentialities for combinations of same.
I use anaphora to express this because I am a poet.
I am a trained poetess who trained with poets
of no class. I was not impressed. I was not engaged
then, not yet, but my partner needed to be worth
more. I am now worth more than I ever have been.
I would throw myself in the Charles for a Kennedy.
But no blacks, Jews, or gays, please (I want to sneeze).

Portlandia, Maine

There are advantages to being a long-suffering wife (not that I'd admit to suffering.) You feel a sense of purity about yourself (leading to acts of true penitence) and a sense of connection to the underlings of the world (not that I'm an underling.) What he does takes months of preparation (for both of us) and the most tender type of care (requiring hired hands) because his activities vindicate us (and we are noble people of destiny.) My problem (which doesn't need to be mentioned on the surface) is that I see double. What we are is this, but also this; here, but also there; real, but somehow fake. For instance, the kids; they're sweet to us, without being sweet to us. Surfaces and depths, run together in a liquid mess. People are like stars, he might say, touching a tree; but I'm lost in the Milky Way. I've learned that that's OK.

Wisconsin Cartoonist

I always say this to the guys at the paper: people are like cartoons. Nothing's real, everything's flimsy, so how about getting me national syndication for some of these? What I join by deep cartooning is the League of Masters. Do you know what that is? Maybe you're not ready to know. I'll tell you this much— we're keepers of Thelema. You don't need to know who or what that is. If you've seen my latest Obama, there are clues. As a Master, I'm planting seeds in the minds of my audience, which is more vast than you realize (count the nationally syndicated ones). You, too, can progress beyond being a cartoon (my latest is shot straight at Britney Spears, and you can bet she'll be destroyed). As I bring down light into America, I do what I will (like Popeye, his one-man audience thinks), that's my law. The cartoon-people will be obliterated.

Columbus to Broadway

That's where I walk most days. As in, I don't get around much. There's not much to do, really; a few things for the kids, a few treats for us, then back to the pad. I loiter on Facebook because it shows me, like nothing else, a moving world. Other than that, nothing to do. I try to keep in mind that not everyone's had the advantages I have. To join, but that's wrong, not join, to be in a family like I'm in means I'm grounded in wealth like no one else. The family allegiance is mine. They say sometimes the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, but I'm not like my parents. I don't run a gay whorehouse. There's no hypocrisy in inactivity. What they did took something from me, just like my wife does. It's her money, of course, but I'm not salty about it. We sit around (and on the money) together. Even if after the kids there's no sex involved. I can deal. Except, goddamn does Amsterdam look ugly on days like this. I feel myself subsumed in ugliness, I don't know why.

It's just another thing to sit through.

South Jersey Sports

All my life, I've never understood why people think baseball's boring. Y'gotta have an eye for nuance, that's all. But that doesn't change certain facts: football has more action, more drama, and it's more rewarding for us over a long period of time. As me and the guys have evolved, we watch for different things. We go from paper to paper, website to website, mag to mag, to look for the best coverage. Nobody's perfect, but the Inquirer's a bunch of horseshit these days. But the important thing is this: the South Jersey sports guys are not like the Philly sports guys. We express true devotion and true faith. Everything we do is done to support our guys (and Philly guys belong to South Jersey too). We resent the rep Philly's got because that's not who we are. Here's where I get emotional: the night we met Mike Schmidt, he told us he'd never met such a bunch of nice guys. It's not just that we knew the numbers, he said; it's that we got the spirit behind the numbers. And since there's no Eagles version of Mike Schmidt, I rank us with anyone in Philly about this stuff, and I mean anyone (and we welcome rivalries). Now, when we do talk-radio assaults, they take our calls and we get listened to. It's been a steady upwards progression. Just watch: the Eagles will eventually talk to us too. We have many lives to lead and many worlds to conquer. The spirit behind the numbers: that's greatness for you.

Penn State Frat House

Six fraternity brothers play beer-pong with six sorority sisters. I stand quietly in a corner, watching. One sorority sister bends over to pick up the ping-pong ball. In my mind, I slap her ass. Fast-forward to her bedroom (or someone's). She has tawdry mouth, and I'm too smart to be doing this. I'm a bio major, as it happens, and got roped into this. Don't mind me, I might say, I don't really exist. I don't play beer-pong. Now her shirt comes off, then her jeans. Not bad, I say, knowing I've seen better. Why did I get roped into doing this? Some of my psych major friends got bored. They were "tired of the grind," and this is their break. As I slip it into her, I feel bored with coitus. I'm bored with this, too— and seeing her face up close (they've switched sides), she looks too much like a fruit-bat to be caught beneath my scalpel. Because God knows I could cut this thing open.

Alexandria Wife

First rule of Bridge Club: you don't talk about Bridge Club. In other words, I've always wanted to be manly. I like girls. But when you're raised to be a D.C. wife (pictures of Presidents and us on the wall), you soon learn the kind of stealth which stands behinds giants. Unfortunately, I know my Swift, and kings are seldom giants. I think about these things in Bridge Club because (after all) I have not only a degree but a graduate degree (unused) and this is so superbly mindless. Down at the pier, I cast caution to the wind and toast Alexandria. Easy come the crabs, following Bridge sideways with a fat-pinch. What my husband does while I imagine fingering my friends is his own damned business. The first rule of D.C. is that you don't talk about what happens in D.C. The rip-off is, Alexandria looks like every other damned suburb in the country. The first rule here is,

keep talking, just don't say anything.

Just think: all the arabesques I could
spin if someone would listen, if some
rule were broken, but it can't be. This
is a place for rulers. Crabs follow hard.

Poconos

Boy, it sure as hell gets lonely the months the kids aren't here. You run a camp, you'd better find some thing else to do the other ten months. Like give myself hand-jobs, for instance (laughs). I've had some funny ones up here recently. This little brat from Philly brought an electric guitar up here (and I'm talking about a twelve-year-old, not a counselor) and set up shop in my fucking office. No, I couldn't take advantage. He was cute, a little skittish, not the type I could mess with. Oh, but don't you worry: I had my conquests this time. It's enough to tide me over. Even if making a living isn't as exciting as making it with little kids. Money can't buy happiness.

Four Kids in Ohio

This jerk had the nerve to ask me why I had kids if I couldn't pay for them (this happened at the fucking Shop-Rite). The kids wanted Cocoa Puffs and Fruit Loops and I only let them get one and they freaked (she takes the bun out of her hair, I admire her). But here, come on, I'll take a hit (talk about sticking it into empty space). Now, me, I've never had the problem of living a small life. My life is too huge for me to handle. I've been embraced by whole worlds (she's stoned). As I get further into my forties, I realize nothing really changes. I'm still a goddess. Don't my kids know? And all this just to pass time.

State College Nights

Oh, these State College nights: if I could contain what I feel in a jar & sell it, I'd be a rich girl. As it is, I run a Dining Commons on campus. I knew I could trust you with this information because you love bad girls. As you know, I have quite the little reputation here. I do as I damn well please. I don't want you to think I have no feelings, but how many feelings would you have if you were pushing forty, working in a slop-house (though the food's not bad, this school is still relatively well-funded), with killer looks, so-so brains, an active libido and a flair for dramatic self-expression? After all, I was supposed to be an actress. But you won't find me acting out any Glass Menagerie. So, off your ass, boy. You're either going to take me now or never. And he does, he takes her. And she takes him. Just like in Paris.

Out Here in Albany

I never take my brains to work. My cubicle is like all the others. I wait each day for the blonde with the big bust to come peer over my shoulder at my Facebook page. We have a mutual acquaintance. She is sizing him up to possibly have an affair with. Why should she, or anyone, care about me?

Oh, these Albany nights. You can see glitter like in Paris anywhere. My wife is also sizing up contenders. I see her doing it at Ruby Tuesday's. As for me, I'm off the market. It's a nice, adult feeling. Underneath, I do care about me. And Albany death wounds like no other, with lethargy; scum of the heart of America. America: a cubicle. That's my America: just blue.

Beale Street Green

You can tell me this shit all you want, I'm not gonna listen (who does this guy think he is?). It's not bein' defensive, it's stakin' your claim on a family name and not lettin' go. This is what we do: make records. Not singles, not operas, not stage-shows; records. I don't give a shit if they sell. Now, who are you to bring my babies into this? If I can't provide for my babies, that makes me a bad person? Do you know how many artists have had to starve to do what they needed to do? My Pa taught me, the records come first. You let the money shit take care of itself. If the business changes, the music doesn't have to. And if I can't subsist like a normal human being, I don't give a shit about that, either. My name is who I am, and not you or anyone else can take it from me. This all happened, he thinks later, just because I use my money to go out and have fun. This guy can never play with us again. There is no changing business. The business of making records doesn't change. I know it can't. I know what my business is: records. And it can't change.

Pennsylvtucky

Now when Bucky was goin' through his fat n' happy phase, he'd put down a dozen hot-dogs in a day. I've spent my life lookin' after that guy, but he's still crazy. This whole town's crazy. We still don't know who them cult guys were. We found a dead crow nailed to a tree on the edge of the Brewer's farm. We thought it might be the big albino guy who lives in the woods, but we don't know. Bucky & I have been through everything here. This is our whole world, and we're proud of it. What's a better place than this?

Colorado Rocky

Now, I've told you my pocket philosophy (and I've got roughly what you need), but it's worth looking at again (as you sort through this stuff and, c'mon, you know what you'll find)— life is just “up” and “down” working like pistons in an engine. Every experience you have gives you an “up” or a “down.” The trick is to rig things towards the maximum number of “ups.” Well, of course it is. I'm a family man these days. I appreciate nature. This, as a stepping stone, is a total “up” (don't get even a little paranoid, mind the script); not too far from Vegas, a private place to cool my heels. Well, no, not everything has to be “up.” That's all you want to take, man (this guy thinks we're both small-time, but he's got no hustle, who cares)? That's the next two weeks taken care of. Tomorrow I get my little reward, just a taste of one. Now, where are my kids? Life is hard, I need someone to take care of me sometimes. My kids are good like that.

Kentucky Woman (She Get to Know You)

Mister, if you think my girls stepped out of a Neil Diamond song, you are sorely mistaken. I get to know you first; then (maybe) you get to know the girls. First: you've got the right voice. Are you from these parts (and I do mean this state)? Have you ever been arrested (even for a traffic violation)? Can you document that that's all it was (hands papers). I suppose that's alright. Now, I need some documentation that you're in a state of good health (hands papers). Fine. My final question is this: are you true to your country, do you swear by Jesus, do you swear by the holy Bible and the power of the Scriptures over every other source of sustenance? That will do. We got off to a shaky start, but you've got the right profile. Now, please wait in the sitting room. The escort I've selected for you will be in to accompany you shortly.

Television Culture

My colleagues ask me why I do this.
I tell them I find television culture
fascinating. It is; if you've learned
how to do the slice-and-dice with
demographics, every commercial becomes
a koan to be mastered. Is it wrong to be
like the rest of America? Is it criminal
to eschew the Ivory Tower? Just by
watching, I become a case study in irony-
I'm pleased by own levels and images. T.V.
fosters illusions of omnipotence- T.V. eyes
are omniscient. I'm not confused about
these things either. When the quality of
what's published in your field sinks to
unfathomable lows, you can rebel in a
high-minded way or wallow. If I, unlike
my pontificating colleagues, choose to
wallow, it's because my pretense is that
of no pretense at all- I universalize
myself. "Clicker" is a shibboleth I am
employing to do this. I am on the ground
with the groundlings. Where publishing is
concerned, I've already perished. But
frigid purgatorial fires are not for me.
Now I pay attention to nothing.

Ave Maria Nursing Home

I suppose they take OK care of me here. What they don't realize is that despite my illness, my brain still functions. I have to live with having two kids die before me, if you call this life, if not being able to form words in my mouth counts as life. (Nurse comes in) she thinks I have no thoughts, and to prop me up near the TV is to extinguish any discomfort. If Elvis (a man younger than me) were to live to this age, would they let him stay at Graceland? I suppose they'd have to hire a whole team just to provide for his very regal, very superior needs. This is a get-what-you-pay-for place, in a get-what-you-pay-for-city, and the rest of America must be no different. Because no one respects an elderly person in diapers with no family, I have to live as a termite, one with no teeth, and hold everything in but my shit and piss, which expresses my true self so explosively it might as well be Elvis.

Bethlehem

“You’re not like me: you didn’t grow up in fucking Bethlehem. You don’t know what a steel town is. You come from the little tinker toy suburbs. Did you get a car for your sixteenth birthday? I’ve been trained to hate, and it’s what I love. I only like what’s like me.” I sat in a coffee shop in Bethlehem, & listened to this girl. She had curly black hair, pale skin, brilliant blue eyes, but I’d say the combination didn’t work. Nor did the college sweatshirt, nor the jeans, nor the tawdry saltiness of her voice. As I walked out, the sky was so entirely starless that I rose into it, & flew away, on my tinker toy wheels.

Main Line Scam

Ever since we had the kid, I've developed a bunch of tricks to live through the nights. First off, I pretend I'm

someone else. Once I'm someone else, I pretend I have a life I can respect. Once that's there, I begin my pillage

of the downtown bars. I'm rich, of course, tall, and independently wealthy. I write books. They sell in

immoderate quantities. I'm a gourmand, I eat well but stay mysteriously thin. I drink rare German beers.

But we have the kid, who reminds me in shrill terms I'm not that person. I barely work, except I have cover,

she's covering me, and my folks pay for everything. I can respect nothing, not even my fantasies, because

my father tells me Do what needs to be done. He's endured through so much, he really has. Thoughts

run riot about this, like all the teeth he scammed out of people's mouths. This is his kid, not mine. They

diaper and bathe him at the country club, me too.

The next trick is to disappear where there is no cover.

Fags and Us

I can't stand it when this guy walks by the store. I've lived and worked in this neighborhood for thirty years, this guy's been here almost as long, but I've never gotten used. When I look in the mirror, I see: regular slacks, dress-shirt, tie. I come in, ready to do business. But this fat hippie moron with the "Poetry" sign and the Amish beard comes past us, looking down at our uncreative clothes, often offered at discount rates these days, as if he's this big genius for smoking dope. How does he eat? Where does he live? Who's taking care of him? We all pay our own way. We're decent people. But when I lose my temper, it's always because some freeloading moron stumbles in with some bullshit story about what this city means. It means two things: fags and us. No gold.

Old, Old, Woodstock

If that's what you're gonna offer, I can't sell you this for the price you want. C'mon, this isn't some piece of shit we've had lying here for three years. Check the books— this is one with the right history. A piece with this level of class shows us (even after we've been in the business forty years) why we went into antiques. It's the pursuit of beauty, my friend. Time determines beauty, because tastes ripen, tastes change. If you see the angles on this, you see what craft used to be, when people still cared. But this craft doesn't come cheap. God knows, what else is there to value these days? As you're just passing through here, and you admit Woodstock is one of the most beautiful places you've ever seen (and I agree, it is a charmed place), this is the right memento for you. Isn't it fun to turn from dealer into buyer, for once? It's refreshing. But I can't go any beneath what I just told you.

Pittsburgh Character Actress

Once all the lightweights and half-assed prima donnas disappear, I'll be the only one left standing. Endurance matters more than charisma does. And, no, I'm not bitter about my non-leading lady status. It's more easy to be memorable when people know what to expect from you. Take Nicholson; we always know what to expect from Jack. Of course, I have a lot of technical expertise he doesn't. I always tell my students, you don't fill the holes, you don't get the roles. Well, that's your problem. We all know you're basically a lightweight too. The difference between us is simple: you're in Pittsburgh because you're stuck, I'm here because I matter. And all the "hug me, love me, suck my juices" stuff you use with your students is cute but it's tacky. As I get older, Lizzie & Laura lose their hotness. Give me the raw girls with the tats. And watch me go.

